

FAAP Remarks, Sao Paulo, May 27, 2010

I would like to thank the faculty and students at the FAAP (the FAH-pee) for the opportunity to speak to you today. It is a pleasure and an honor not only to be at this institution, but also to be amongst such a distinguished audience. FAAP is home to one of the strongest U.S. Studies programs in Brazil, and that you have hosted many American lecturers, guests and speakers. The students here are among the best and brightest in Brazil and you are no doubt among Brazil's future leaders.

I was recently appointed by President Barack Obama to be the Administration's Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, a role that I am deeply honored to have, and one that is of personal significance to me. I am the product of the American Muslim community - a community of nearly 7 million people and one that has prospered in all fields. It is also a community that practices its faith freely in the United States. Since the President's election, I have served on the President's legal team, observing first hand and contributing to his commitment to renewing relations with Muslim communities around the world.

During my tenure thus far, I have traveled across the world not only spreading President Obama's message of engagement but taking steps to see that his vision

for a new beginning with Muslim communities around the world is fulfilled by actions. And it is a message that extends to communities in Brazil. Brazil is home to 400,000 Muslims making it the host of the largest Muslim Community in Latin America. Sao Paulo itself is known for its vibrant Muslim community. That makes my message today all the more important and relevant.

Just over a year ago, the President delivered a speech at Cairo University that outlined a vision for a new beginning between the United States and Muslim communities around the world based on mutual interest and mutual respect. He said that America and Islam are not exclusive, but share common principles of justice and progress, tolerance and the dignity of all human beings. He discussed Islam's tradition of tolerance, and the importance of freedom of religion. He asked us to recognize our common humanity and seek common ground. He emphasized that our commitment to these principles will be judged by our actions, not our words. While we will continue to work toward these goals throughout the course of the Administration, here is where we have come so far.

On his second day in office, the President appointed Sen. George Mitchell as his envoy for Middle East peace. This Administration recognizes the urgency and importance of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and is absolutely

committed to the overall goal of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, with Israeli and Palestinian states living side by side in peace and security. While there will be ups and down along the way, the President will continue to be persistent and will not walk away from this issue.

The President has articulated a clear strategy for Afghanistan that combines a military strategy to break the Taliban's momentum and increase Afghanistan's capacity, as well as a civilian strategy, because we recognize that "military power alone is not going to solve the problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan." We have focused on increasing our engagement and our foreign assistance commitments to help build opportunity and brighter futures for the Afghan and Pakistani people. We are also committed to end the war in Iraq responsibly and to transform our relationship with Iraq, from one focused on security to a civilian-led partnership based on shared interests.

The President's commitment to engagement extends to those with whom are relations are strained. If his nominee is confirmed by the Senate, President Obama will be sending the first ambassador to Syria since 2005, not to signal acceptance of Syrian policies, but to open a channel of communication to address our concerns

directly. It is incumbent upon all countries to behave in a responsible manner to promote peace and stability, and to live up to their international obligations. We expect this of ourselves and ask it of others.

The President's vision is a comprehensive framework that will not only focus on tackling the central issues that have caused tension between the United States and Muslim communities around the world, but is also built on the premise that people all around the world share the same fundamental concerns; their ability to pursue opportunities, take care of their families, and have access to fundamental resources such as education and health care.

In Cairo, the President has also repeatedly emphasized that violent extremism has no place in Islam and is rejected by its holy texts. In doing so, he quoted a famous verse of the Quran, which equates the murder of any innocent person with the killing of all humanity. He did so after the massacre at Fort Hood in Texas, where he noted that no faith accepts such acts, and that the killer will face justice in this life and the next. After the attempted attack on the 25th of December, he also reiterated this message, noting that the vast majority of victims of terrorism are Muslims. Despite these attacks, and the recent attempt in Times Square, the

President has reaffirmed our commitment to engaging Muslim communities all over the world, and we will not let a group of extremists take us off this course.

We must continue to work together to end violent extremism, and in doing so, we must recognize that U.S. policies cannot be blamed for this violence. The overwhelming majority of victims of terrorism are Muslims. How can anyone blame U.S. policy for the decision to attack fellow Muslims on Friday prayer? How can anyone justify going on a plane and killing other innocent individuals – both non-Muslim and Muslim - without any doubt in his heart that this is a sinful act that will result in their spiritual, as well as their physical, destruction? It is our duty to eradicate this ideology completely and blaming the foreign policy of any country is not the answer. No policy grievance justifies the slaughter of innocent people.

The President has a long term vision that requires us to take action at all levels, and indeed we have.

On education, we are committed to expanding opportunities for students from North Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia to visit and study in the U.S. If any of you have or considered an opportunity to study abroad, you know the cost is

often prohibitive. In the last year the U.S. has increased funding for target exchange programs by over 30%, with an additional 14% increase proposed for 2011. We are also encouraging American students to study abroad by providing more scholarships to students interested in learning languages during their summer breaks.

Partnering with Muslim communities to foster economic growth is also vital to the President's vision for a new beginning - promoting entrepreneurship is the cornerstone of this effort. The President's Entrepreneurship Summit was held last month. About 200 foreign delegates from over 55 countries attended. Most were from Muslim majority countries but many others like Brazil, China, and France were represented both by members of their Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Another 75 entrepreneurs from the United States attended, including the co-founder of Facebook and a cofounder of Yahoo! Delegates participated in two days of U. S. government- sponsored events, including panels on access to capital, women's economic inclusion, and building a culture of entrepreneurship. You should feel very proud that Sao Paulo was part of the success of that summit.

Mr. Andre Luis Lara Mello was a summit attendee from Sao Paulo. In fact, he represented the entire nation of Brazil at the summit. He witnessed firsthand the

President's commitment to promoting entrepreneurship and networking between Muslim communities and the United States. As a journalist Andre has a tremendous opportunity to engage with Muslim communities not only in Brazil but around the world. And indeed he has. He has been working on a book entitled "Mosques of Sao Paulo" and has even traveled to Sudan. I see Andre as a perfect example of the President's message that engagement with the Muslim world extends to Brazil, just as much as it does to other nations. I encourage Andre to continue his active engagement in his community and to develop and utilize the contacts he made at the summit. And I encourage all of you to engage yourselves in your own communities.

One thing you should understand is that the President's Commitment to Entrepreneurship did not expire with that summit. Next year, the Government of Turkey will host the entrepreneurship summit in Istanbul, and now we see other countries also engaging. Indonesia, for example, will host a regional Entrepreneurship event later this year.

On science and technology, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation has issued a call for proposals for funds to support private sector investments that promote access to and growth of technology. These funds will invest hundreds of

millions of dollars in companies that address areas such as technology, education, telecom, media, business services and financial technology, and clean-tech. The U.S. has also established a new Science Envoys program, which sends prominent U.S. scientists overseas.

Global Health is an area in which the U.S. has been working directly with the Organization of the Islamic Conference Secretariat and its member states. In Cairo, the President announced a new initiative to work with the OIC to eradicate polio. Polio remains endemic in three OIC countries (Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan) and in India where it disproportionately affects Muslim communities. Polio knows no boundaries, and countries that were once rid of the disease have faced new cases, including in Senegal, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Tajikistan. I know only last year, Brazil held a Polio Vaccination campaign to ensure that children under five had access to the polio vaccine.

In Cairo, the President also spoke about the importance of promoting interfaith engagement. He said that tolerance is essential for religion to thrive and that freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together. We are carrying out his vision, including through the recently convened U.S.-Indonesia

Interfaith Conference in Jakarta, which brought together faith leaders from eight countries and leaders from the private sector and civil society to work together on common projects that will have an impact on their communities, including in the areas of poverty eradication, environment, education, and governance. But do not think that the President's message only applies to Indonesia. Efforts worldwide are underway to promote interfaith dialogue. Today, you are part of one of those efforts. As I speak to all of you about engagement in Muslim communities, I encourage you to find ways to engage in meaningful dialogue with your neighbors and peers about their faiths. As future business leaders, diplomats, and scholars you will find that those dialogues to be invaluable.

As I move forward in my position, I will continue to reach out to Muslim communities around the world. I will work to implement new initiatives in science & technology and promote entrepreneurship, and engage in meaningful dialogue on the key political issues of importance to the U.S. and in Muslim communities abroad. And I know that as future leaders, diplomats, lawyers and professionals, you understand the importance of engagement to people of all faiths.

The new beginning President Obama seeks is not a short-term priority for the U.S., but rather a long-term commitment. This vision is based on mutual respect and a

shared understanding that we will not be successful in the areas of health, women's rights, science & technology and even resolving conflicts if we do not work together. I personally will be working to promote these partnerships in the hopes of developing productive, sustainable, and mutually beneficial relationships with Muslim communities around the world.

We understand that change will not happen overnight, and that success in this arena will be measured in terms of the quality, impact, and longevity of our partnerships, and the effectiveness of our policies. That said, the United States is deeply committed to realizing the President's vision of a new beginning. We are implementing a government-wide approach, engaging not only the Department of State, but the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, USAID, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Energy, and others to work towards developing true partnerships based on mutual respect, mutual interest, and mutual responsibility.

You may have wondered in the beginning of my presentation why I chose to come to Brazil, where Christianity is practiced far more than Islam. I hope it is clear to you that the President's engagement of the Muslim world does not stop at Muslim

majority countries, but extends to Brazil and so many countries with Muslim populations.

Today we have talked about the President's message about engaging the global Muslim community. We've talked about the actions the U.S. has taken to engage Muslims and about what we hope to accomplish in the future. As President Obama has said, "It is easier to start wars than to end them. It is easier to blame others than to look inward, to see what is different about someone than to find the things we share." I hope you have been inspired to continue to engage positively here in Sao Paulo, both with the United States and in other capacities. And I hope we can continue to build on the values we all share.